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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE

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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 3275

RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 3386

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1809

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2643

RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 3013

RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0074

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000046

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SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ECON ZI

SUBJECT: ZIM NOTES 01-25-2010

¶1. SUMMARY

Official Constitutional Outreach Suspended...
... While ZANU-PF Launches Its Own Menacing Campaign...
WOZA Protest Disrupted, Three Arrested...
Journalist Flees After Death Threats from Cop...
Wheels of Justice Too Slow for Bennett...

Religious Group Faces Arrest Over Measles Immunization...
Abductees Rearrested, Released...
Dry Spell Threatens 2010 Harvest...
Millers Push for GMO Grain Imports...
Government Revenue Falters...
Companies Urged to Improve Competitiveness...

On the Political and Social Front

¶2. The Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on the constitution suspended the outreach phase of the constitutional review process citing disagreements over lack of funding and rapporteurs who should collect and collate public views. This month the teams were expected to begin their outreach efforts. The PSC is waiting for UNDP-promised funding for public outreach that will include per diems, fuel, and stipends for MPs as they canvass the country. The PSC pledged to resolve the emerging disagreements over rapporteurs. This appears to be a bump in the road; those involved believe the process will soon resume.

¶3. We've received several reports this week of soldiers, war veterans, and ZANU-PF officials calling rallies in villages in Manicaland and in the Mashonaland provinces where villagers and farm owners are told that they must vote for the Kariba draft or face renewed violence or loss of property; headmen have been told to get their constituents to vote for Kariba "or else." One MDC councilor told the press, "We're telling our supporters not to attend any of these meetings. They shouldn't be afraid because if it means dying

we all die together."

¶4. Members of Women and Men of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) marched to the Ministry of Education in Harare on Monday to hand over their report on the education system in Zimbabwe entitled Looking Back to Look Forward. The report covers recommendations and a list of demands that parents want addressed by the Minister of Education, Senator David Coltart. Police interrupted the peaceful demonstration, arresting three people, a woman and two men. One of the men, Andrisson Manyere, is an accredited journalist who was previously abducted and tortured by security agents in 2008; he was released later that day without charge. One woman was held in jail for two nights while police refused to assign an officer to her case.

¶5. Journalist Stanley Kwenda fled to South Africa this week after he was reportedly threatened with death by senior police officer Chief Superintendent Chrispen Makedenge. Kwenda published a story last week describing the suicide of Makedenge's wife who reportedly killed herself after suffering years of abuse and threats by her violent husband. Makedenge is feared among activists in Zimbabwe as he was involved in the 2008 abductions and torture of over a dozen Qhe was involved in the 2008 abductions and torture of over a dozen MDC and human rights activists.

¶6. On January 21 the Roy Bennett trial was again postponed to January 25 owing to indisposition of one of the two assessors who presides over the trial with Judge Chinembiri Bhunu. Judge Bhunu was expected to rule on whether the prosecution's key witness, Michael Peter Hitschmann, should be impeached and therefore liable to be cross examined by the prosecution. Bennett's lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa, told us that the pace of the trial was too slow and remarked

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that the adjournments were invariably longer than the court sittings.

¶7. Members of loosely-affiliated religious groups known as apostolic sects face arrests over their refusal on religious grounds to immunize their children against measles. On January 22, The Herald reported that in the last three months 51 children have died of measles because their apostolic parents refused to immunize them. Now the government has threatened to arrest those apostolics who refuse to immunize their children. Last year many apostolics succumbed to cholera after refusing to seek medical treatment.

¶8. Two MDC Councilors in Banket were arrested on Monday and released without charge the same day. Concilia Chinanzavana and Fanny Tembo were reportedly accused of kidnapping a ZANU-PF councilor during the 2008 elections. Both were kidnapped in late October 2008 and held by security agents and tortured for two months before appearing in Harare police custody in December 2008 and January 2009. MDC and human rights activists believe the arrests are meant to continue to intimidate them and MDC supporters in the area.

On the Economic and Business Front

¶9. A month-long dry spell in most parts of the country is threatening agricultural production this year. The Zimbabwe Farmer's Union, which represents most small-scale farmers, says that its members have lost around 60 percent of their crops. As a result, Zimbabwe is facing potential massive food shortages this year with food crops already wilting in many parts of the country. Tobacco farmers have also been forced to reap their crop before maturity, thereby accepting poor yields rather than waiting and writing the crop off completely. More detailed crop assessments will be available in a few weeks. For now, experts tell us the 2010 maize harvest will be no better than 2009 and potentially somewhat lower.

¶10. The Grain Millers' Association of Zimbabwe (GMAZ) has advised government to lift an import ban on genetically modified grain in view of the looming drought-induced shortage. The chairman of GMAZ,

who criticized a skewed government policy on GMOs that allows imported maize meal in the country but bars grain, wants the policy harmonized.

¶11. According to a report in the Financial Gazette, government revenue in December was US\$20 million below target, casting doubt on the GOZ's US\$1.4 billion revenue projection for 2010, especially in view of tax cuts in the 2010 Budget. The government proposes to reduce corporate tax from 30 percent to 25 percent, cut individual tax from 40 percent to 35 percent, and increase the list of imported products on zero-rated duty. These tax concessions will certainly result in a fall in revenue unless there is substantial economic growth.

¶12. At a workshop organized to consider export opportunities under the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and COMESA trade protocols, the vice president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries urged firms to improve competitiveness ahead of the 2013 deadline when 45 percent of goods from the EU will enter Zimbabwe duty-free. While acknowledging that local industry operated under very harsh conditions in the past that made it difficult to be efficient, he urged companies to increase efficiencies by cutting costs and improving product quality.

Quote of the Week

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¶13. "ZANU-PF wants to take the country back to 2008. Their reason is that they are clear in their minds that any process that may lead to elections is against them because they cannot win any election in the foreseeable future. They will scuttle the constitution, delay or totally derail the talks, block the land audit while physically bringing back violence out in the countryside." -- Unnamed Senior MDC Official, speaking to The Zimbabwe Independent, January 22, ¶2010.

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